DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 457 466 CG 031 240

AUTHOR	Bulach, Clete; Fulbright, Julie Penland; Williams, Ronnie
TITLE	Bullying Behavior: What Is the Potential for Violence at Your School?
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	16p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Behavior Problems; *Bullying; Elementary Secondary Education; High Risk Students; *Measurement; *Predictive Measurement; *School Safety; Student Behavior; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS	Department of Education

ABSTRACT

Research was undertaken to design an instrument that could identify schools prone to the occurrence of violence. A secondary purpose was to identify signs that might indicate that violence was a likely occurrence. The instrument had five factors that described where bullying occurred; the types and reasons for bullying; how students were treated; ways students reported bullying; and their feelings of self-efficacy. Based on the results, school officials concluded that bully behavior was not a serious problem in their school. The instrument did reflect that bullying occurred and determined what behaviors were potential problems. It cautions school officials from relying on survey data alone in dealing with bullying behavior. Included is a list from the Department of Education on early warning signs that student violence could occur. Appendix A lists Factors and Corresponding Behaviors. (Contains 11 references.) (JDM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 457 466

BULLYING BEHAVIOR

Bullying Behavior: What is the Potential for Violence at Your School?

Clete Bulach, Associate Professor
Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations
State University of West Georgia
Carrollton, GA 30118
770-214-8318 (H)
770-836-4435 (W)
770-836-4646 FAX
cbulach@westga.edu/ (e-mail)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
C. Bulach
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2B

Julie Penland Fulbright, Research Analyst
Blue Ridge Elementary School
550 Blue Ridge Drive
Evans, GA 30809
706-868-0894 (W)
706-868-2181 FAX
julie.fullbright@ccboe.com

Ronnie Williams, Executive Director
West Georgia Leadership Academy
State University of West Georgia
Carrollton, GA 30118
770-838-3275 (W)
770-836-4646 FAX
rwilliam@westga.edu/

Clete Bulach is a retired school superintendent from Ohio and has spent the last 11 years in higher education with a research specialty in character education and school culture/climate.

Julie Penland was the research analyst at the time of this study and she is now a counselor at Blue Ridge Elementary School in Columbia County.

Ronnie Williams was the Superintendent of Carrollton City Schools at the time of this study. He retired this past year and works part-time at the State University of West Georgia.

CG031240

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Bullying Behavior: What is the Potential for Violence at Your School?

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to develop an instrument that might identify those schools that are more prone to the occurrence of violence. A secondary purpose was to identify a number of indicators or signs that might indicate that violence was likely to occur. A factor analysis revealed that the instrument has five factors. The authors conclude that the instrument provides useful data to assist school officials in developing a plan to reduce bullying behaviors. It identifies those behaviors that are potential problems and where and when bullying occurs. School officials are cautioned not to rely on survey data alone in dealing with bullying behavior. There are a number of indicators or signs that can be observed in the student body if the faculty is sensitized to the indicators. A list of these indicators is provided.

Introduction

Seventy-five percent of adolescents have been bullied while attending school (Peterson, 1999). Newspaper articles with similar statistics dealing with bullying behavior are becoming more commonplace. Beane (1999), in a book on the topic, stated that one in seven children is subjected to bullying behavior and that it affects about five million elementary and junior high students. Bullying behavior played some role in all the school shootings during the past two years. Not only do victims of bullying behavior bear emotional scars that can lead to violence, the victim of bullying behavior is frequently disliked by peers (Peterson, 1999). This double whammy, so to speak, of being picked on by a bully and ostracized by peers can have devastating consequences. According to Beale (2001), bullying behavior has detrimental effects for both the victim and the bully. Children identified as bullies are three times more likely to break the law by age 30. Victims on the other hand, suffer academically and socially with suicide being one of the most drastic repercussions.

Bullying behavior can take many forms. It can be physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual (U. S. Department of Education, 1999). School officials are quick to respond to physical bullying because it is usually visual and easy to see. Verbal and emotional bullying in the form of taunting, teasing, rejection, humiliation, etc. are often not seen and if seen sometimes tolerated. According to Brendtro (2001) hundreds of thousands of students are teased and taunted each day. He states that ridicule is a form of bullying behavior that is designed to make a person the object of scorn or derision. Further, he reported that teachers noticed and intervened in only one out of 25 episodes of verbal or emotional bullying behavior.

The death of a Georgia student in Cherokee County due to bullying attracted national attention to the issue of bullying in November of 1998. Recognizing the severity of the problem, state lawmakers in Georgia passed a law to deal with bullying behavior. The law went into effect on July 1, 1999 and bullying was defined as follows:

- Any willful attempt to inflict injury on another person, when accompanied by an apparent present ability to do so; or
- any intentional display of force such as would give the victim reason to fear or expect immediate bodily harm.

As a result of the law, all school district officials are to adopt policies that deal with weapons and bullying behavior. Further, three time offenders are to be sent to alternative schools.

The development of bullying behavior starts in elementary school, with the highest frequency of bullying behavior occurring in middle school. Bullying behavior somewhat decreases in high school, yet is sometimes given more attention due to the physical size of students and nature of some incidences to contain sexual harassment (Vail, 1999). Research indicates that if

school officials want to protect students against acts of victimization by their peers, they will have to use a school-wide systemic approach to prevent and respond to bullying behavior (Clarke and Kiselica, 1997).

Bullying behavior is thought to be one of the major causes of violence in the school setting. The two students who were involved in the Columbine High School shootings were teased mercilessly according to some reports. The development of a scale or instrument to identify the extent of bullying behavior in the school and to further identify who is being bullied might help reduce violence in the school setting. School officials would be able to take pro-active measures to reduce bullying before students reacted violently to such behavior.

Statement of the problem/purpose

School officials all across the country are implementing plans and policies to combat increasing events of violence that take place in school settings. The problem is "school officials often have little warning that violence will occur until it is too late." The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that the faculty frequently does not recognize the true extent of bullying in the school (Barone, 1997). It would help if there were a method for diagnosing the extent of bullying in the school and the potential for violence to occur. Consequently, the purpose of this research was to develop an instrument that would provide such a method. A secondary purpose was to identify a number of indicators or signs that might indicate that violence was likely to occur.

Bullying is defined as any form of verbal or physical abuse with intent to harm or hurt. Another phrase often used to describe bullying behavior is "picked on." There is one qualifier to bullying behavior. According to Olweus (1998) verbal or physical abuse between equals is not

bullying behavior. In order for that behavior to be labeled as bullying, the aggressor must be superior physically, psychologically or in some other way. For example, if a student were not superior physically or psychologically, but had a big brother or a gang that could exact punishment, this could be used to bully a victim.

Procedures

School officials from Carrollton City Schools and the Carrollton Police Department wrote a grant and obtained funding to study bullying behavior at Carrollton Junior High School. The grant was for $123,000 and was funded by the federal government through a school-based partnership grant. A full-time research analyst and a project evaluator (part-time) from the State University of West Georgia were hired. They developed an instrument to generate student data on bullying behavior at their school. The first draft of the instrument went through several pilot administrations, revisions, and factor analyses. The final version consisted of 59 items and was administered to all students (N = 745) in grades six through eight.

Scoring/analysis

The first eight items on the instrument measure a category of data that could be relevant for developing pro-active measures to curtail bullying behavior, e.g., grade level, gender, parental status, etc. The remaining 51 items measure student perceptions of behaviors thought to be relevant for bullying. Students respond to each of the items according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always." Never is scored as a 1.0 and always is scored as a 5.0. Twenty-four of the items are negative behaviors, e.g., "I am picked on because of the way I look.". Students who respond with a "never" to a negative behavior receive a positive score of 1.0. An "always" response would receive a negative score of 5.0, i.e., the higher the score the more

negative the response. Twenty-six of the items are stated as positive behaviors, e.g., "students show respect for each other." An "always" or positive response to this type of behavior is reverse scores, e.g., an "always" response is scored as a 1.0 and a "never" response is scored as 5.0.

A factor analysis revealed that the scale had five factors as follows: (see Appendix A for the behaviors associated with each factor)

- Factor one--where bullying occurs; (ten behaviors)
- Factor two--the type and reason for bullying; (six behaviors)
- Factor three--how students are treated; (nine behaviors)
- Factor four--the way students report bullying behavior; (five behaviors) and
- Factor five--feelings of self-efficacy (twenty-one).

There were two behaviors that did not load on factor five, but they were placed with factor five because we believed they measured some aspect of self-efficacy. They are as follows:

- when I am in a tough situation, I think positively; and
- I get embarrassed easily.

Results

A Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Factors one through five had correlation coefficients as follows: factor one = +.82, factor two = +.82, factor three = +.75, factor 4 = +.72, and factor five = +.68. The overall measure of internal consistency and reliability yielded a correlation coefficient of +.85.

Mean scores for each of the factors and the relationship of the factors to each other were also determined. Mean scores for each factor ranged from a low of 1.55 for factor two (type and reason for bullying) to a high of 3.09 for factor one (where bullying occurs). A score of 3.0 indicates that sometimes this behavior happened, while a score of 1.55 indicates that the behavior occurred a little. Correlational data ranged from a high of +.40** between factors one and two and a low of .09 between factors two and four. Nine of the ten comparisons were significant at the .01 level (see Table 1).

The correlation between factor one "where bullying occurs" and factor two "the type and reason for bullying" at +.40 was the strongest. Apparently, those who have a higher frequency of being picked on, are also more likely to see others being picked on. The correlation between factor one and three "the way students are treated" had a correlation of -.03. It would appear that there is no relationship between seeing bullying behavior and seeing caring and respectful behavior. The correlation between factor one and four "how bullying behavior is reported" is also weak with a +.23 correlation. This weak correlation is caused by students who report that they are less likely to report bullying behavior even though they might see it or be victims of it. The correlation between factor one and factor five "feelings of self-efficacy" (.11) is even lower. This could be caused by feelings of anxiety that are generated by being a witness to bullying behavior and being unable to do anything to stop it.

Table 1.

The correlations of the scale factors

	Factor one	Factor two	Factor three	Factor four	Factor five
Factor one Where bullying occurs	1.00				
Factor two Type and reason for bullying	.404**	1.00			
Factor three How students are treated	-.030	.237*	1.00		
Factor four How students report bullying	.230*	.088	.402**	1.00	
Factor five Self-efficacy	.116	.340**	.376**	.343**	1.00

** P < 003, * P < .02, N = 673,

The correlation between factor two and factor three was +.237. This low correlation was not expected. For example a student who has a high score (negative) on type of bullying could be the object of bullying behavior. This same student should have a high negative score on the fair and caring treatment of students. We expected the correlation to be more positive than indicated by our study. Nevertheless, while it is not very strong, it is positive and significant. The correlation between factor two and factor four was +`.088. This is very disconcerting, but what it seems to say is that a number of students who are bullied, do not report it. Factor two measures whether bullying is reported. If a student is bullied and it is reported, the student would have a

high score on factor two and a low score on factor four. This would have caused a negative correlation. Since the correlation is almost nonexistent, it means that a number of students who are bullied do not report it. The correlation between factor two and factor five is +.34. It would have been expected that students who are bullied would have had a low sense of self-efficacy, and this tends to be the case. Students with high scores on bullying (negative) tended to have higher negative scores on self-efficacy.

The correlation between factor three and factor four was +.402. This indicates that students who report seeing fair and caring behaviors also tend to report bullying behavior. Similar results were found for factors three and five. Students who report seeing fair and caring behaviors tend to have higher levels of self-efficacy as indicated by the correlation of +.376 between the two factors. Similarly, students with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to report bullying behavior, as indicated by the correlation of +.343 between factors four and five.

Limitation of the study

The correlation coefficients, even though they are significant, are so low as to make it difficult for any predictions or conclusions to be made. Consequently, the above interpretations are based more on our experience with middle schools students than they are on the data.

Indicators that violence might occur

School officials are cautioned not to rely on survey data alone in dealing with bullying behavior. There are a number of indicators or signs that can be observed in the student body if the faculty is sensitized to the indicators. An information bulletin from the United States Department of Education (1999) cited the following as early warning signals that student violence could occur:

- severe social withdrawal;
- excessive feelings of isolation and being alone;
- excessive feelings of rejection;
- a victim of violence;
- feelings of being picked on and/or persecuted;
- poor or deteriorating performance;
- expressions of violence in writings or drawings;
- uncontrolled anger;
- pattern of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying;
- history of disciplinary problems;
- prejudicial attitudes and intolerance for differences;
- affiliation with gangs;
- access to, possession of, or use of firearms; and
- threats of violence.

Morgan (1999) cited many of the same indicators of violence, but added a few that were not mentioned in the government bulletin as follows:

- triggering events such as a threat, a betrayal, an unsupportable loss such as a girl friend, a failure at competition, a problem with parents, and ostracism from their peer group;
- being a victim of sexual or physical abuse;
- drug or alcohol abuse;
- brain damage from a head injury;

- trouble controlling feelings of anger
- failure to acknowledge the rights of others; and
- enjoys hurting animals

Beane (1999) also lists similar early warning signs that school violence could occur. They are the following:

- there is a sudden change in academic performance accompanied by poor attendance, lack of interest and difficulty concentrating;
- the student is lonely and withdrawn with poor interpersonal skills and a poor sense of humor and frequently does not stand up for him-herself;
- the student is frequently ill or has a physical disability or is physically much different due to weight, size, or appearance; and
- the student has sudden changes in mood such as being irritable, crying easily, depressed, anxious, or overly sensitive.

Conclusions

Based on the mean scores, school officials concluded that bullying behavior at Carrollton Junior High School was not a serious problem. The instrument does reflect that bullying occurs, but a score of 1.5 on the scale that measures the types of bullying indicates that it occurs only once in awhile. The instrument provides useful data to assist school officials in developing a plan to reduce bullying behaviors. It identifies those behaviors that are potential problems. For example, if the score on the behavior "students are picked on before class" has the worst score, school officials will be able to target their plan to reduce bullying in hallways and bathrooms. The instrument also

identifies those students who are often the recipients of bullying behavior. This allows teachers and counselors to be more watchful and protective when they are around these students.

School officials are cautioned not to rely on survey data alone in dealing with bullying behavior. There are a number of indicators or signs that can be observed in the student body if the faculty is sensitized to the indicators. A quotation from a recent ASCD publication seems a fitting conclusion: "The human relationships between students and educators play as crucial a role in school life as curriculum or instruction and may have a powerful an effect on learning" (p.1). It behooves school administrators to sensitize their staff to those signs that indicate a student is having trouble in an attempt to improve the human relationships that develop in the school community.

The Sunday issue of The Atlanta Journal and Constitution featured an article (Joyner, 1999) on bullying behavior. A quote from that article was as follows: "Bullying–one of the most insidious and fastest-growing forms of workplace violence–is on the rise worldwide..." (p. 1—Section R-1) The significance of this study is that it allows us to become more informed about bullying where it starts--in the schools. Perhaps as we become better informed about the different types of bullying, where and when it happens, and how often, we will be able to reduce such behaviors, thereby reducing incidents of violence in the schools and eventually in the workplace.

References

ASCD. (Fall, 1999). The social side of schooling: Nurturing human relationships. Curriculum Update, p.1.

Barone, F. J. (1997). Bullying in school: It doesn't have to happen. Phi Delta Kappan, 79(1), 80-82.

Beale, A. V. (2001). "Bullybusters:" Using drama to empower students to take a stand against bullying. Professional School Counseling, 4(4), 300-308.

Beane, A. L. (1999). The bully free classroom, Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Co.

Clarke, E. A., & Kiselica, M. S. (1997). A systemic counseling approach to the problem of bullying. Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, (31), 310-325.

Joyner, T. (8-29-1999). Bullies on the rise. The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Section R-1, p.1.

Morgan, P. L. L. (1999). Kill or be killed: Violence in our schools. Paper presented at the Center for Early Youth and Adolescent Conference at Platteville, WS in July, 1999.

Peterson, K. S. (9-8-1999). Bullies, victims grow into roles that can last a lifetime. USA Today, Section Life, p. 7D.

United States Department of Education. (1999). Preventing bullying: A manual for schools and community (order # ESB0001B). Maryland: Education Publication Center.

United States Department of Education. (1999). Early warnings signs of student violence. Information Bulletin, Washington, D.C.

Vail, K. (1999). Words that wound. American School Board Journal, September, 37-40

Appendix A

Factors and Corresponding Behaviors

Factor one--where bullying occurs; (ten behaviors)

At home or in my neighborhood, someone verbally picks on me. (name-calling, teasing)
At home or in my neighborhood, someone physically picks on me. (hitting, shoving, pushing)
I see others being picked on at school.
Students at school are picked on in the cafeteria.
Students at school are picked on in the hallways.
Students at school are picked on when on the bus.
Students at school are picked on in the classroom, before class starts.
Students at school are picked on in the classroom, during class.
Students at school are picked on in the bathroom.
Students are picked on when school staff aren't around.

Factor two--the type and reason for bullying; (six behaviors)

I am picked on verbally (called names, threatened, etc.) while I'm at school.
I am picked on physically (hit, pushed, shoved, etc.) while I'm at school.
I am picked on because of my name.
I am picked on because of the way I look.
I am picked on because of the clothes I wear.
I am picked on because of other reasons.

Factor three--how students are treated; (nine behaviors)

Students at our school show respect for each other.
Our school is a safe place for students.
The discipline that students receive at our school stops them from repeating the same behavior.
Students at school are held responsible for their actions.
Student discipline is administered fairly at our school.
Friends put pressure on me to do things I don't want to do.
People care about each other at our school.
Teachers at our school help me understand and get along with other students.
When a student is picked on, school staff do something about it.

Factor four--the way students report bullying behavior; (five behaviors)

When I see a student picking on another student, I report it to someone who works at our school.
If I were picked on, I would tell my teacher about it.
If I were picked on, I would tell my parent or guardian about it.
If I were picked on, I would tell my friends about it.
If I were picked on, I would not tell anybody.

Factor five--feelings of self-efficacy (twenty-one).

I get nervous when I try out for things.
When I am in a tough situation, I think positively.
I am sure of myself.
Decisions are hard for me.
I learn from my mistakes.
I learn from others' mistakes.
I can make other students do what I want them to do.
People who know me think I overcome problems easily.
I get embarrassed easily.
I feel safe in the neighborhood I live in.
Teachers at our school help me to feel good about myself
My friends support me.
I like the way I look.
It is hard for me to be patient.
My parents understand me.
I don't get along with other students.
I understand people who are different from me.
People who know me think I am stubborn.
I am not popular.
I want things to work well for me.
I want things to work well for others.